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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 000184

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR EAP/MLS AND DRL/AWH
NSC FOR ELIZABETH PHU AND KURT TONG

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: HUNDREDS ATTEND FUNERAL FOR VIETNAMESE DISSIDENT LEADER

REF: 07 HANOI 1271

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11. (SBU) Summary: The February 16 funeral for Dr. Hoang Minh Chinh, a former Communist Party ideologue and GVN vice minister turned dissident and democracy activist, drew hundreds of relatives and supporters as well as a heavy police presence. Many dissidents reported that they were prevented from attending and intimidated or harassed. Embassy Poloff attended the ceremony and Ambassador Michalak issued a statement calling Chinh "a true patriot" and "a man of courage and dignity." Full text of the Ambassador's statement is in para 9. International media reported on Hoang Minh Chinh's death and funeral, most quoting from the Ambassador's statement, but to date no Vietnamese media outlets have covered either the death or funeral. End summary.

12. (SBU) Chinh, who spent five years in jail under French rule and later 10 years under the communist regime, died in a state-run military hospital in Hanoi on February 7 at the age of 87 after a long struggle with cancer. His funeral took place at a nearby funeral house managed by the hospital. Until his death, Chinh, once the director of Hanoi's Marx-Lenin Institute and a former Vice Minister of Education, remained the leader and Secretary General of the outlawed Democratic Party of Vietnam (DPV), which he co-founded in 2006 as a pro-democracy incarnation of a once legal post-independence political party. Chinh also assisted in the 2006 launch of the underground pro-democracy movement Bloc 8406. SOME DISSIDENTS ABLE TO ATTEND; OTHERS PREVENTED, HARASSED

13. (SBU) The day before the funeral, MFA called PolCouns to express the government's displeasure at Post's decision to send a representative to the funeral; as this decision had not been announced, it is unclear how the GVN knew about Post intentions. Days before the funeral, Embassy and ConGen received e-mails and calls from activists complaining of being blocked by security agents from attending the funeral and called in for interrogation sessions.

Tran Khue, a DPV leader in the South, was blocked from boarding a plane in HCMC and interrogated for eight hours. HCMC-based Bloc 8406 leader Do Nam Hai was also allegedly prevented from going to the airport. AmCit and Vietnamese-American doctor Nhan Nguyen, who reportedly treated Chinh for cancer in the United States in 2005 and had come to Hanoi for the funeral, told Post she was kicked out of her hotel room the day before the event and put on a plane out of the country by security officials.

14. (SBU) Recently-released writer and journalist Tran Khai Thanh Thuy called the Embassy to say she was interrogated at her home for several hours the day before the funeral and threatened with re-arrest, if she attended. She told us that a dissident writer colleague in Haiphong, Nguyen Xuan Nghia (a member of the Bloc 8406 Executive Board), was also interrogated and warned not to attend lest a motor vehicle accident come his way. Youth leader Nguyen Trung told us there were several others who were prevented from

attending the funeral. Pham Hong Son told poloff he was told at the funeral home entrance to pay his respects quickly and leave.

WATCHED BY POLICE, HUNDREDS ATTEND POLITICALLY CHARGED FUNERAL

¶15. (SBU) Embassy poloff attended the tense but relatively orderly February 16 Hanoi funeral ceremony for Chinh, presenting a flower wreath from the Embassy in keeping with Vietnamese tradition. Chinh was eulogized and laid to rest with three to four hundred family, friends and fellow democracy activists in attendance while scores of plain clothes GVN security agents who were present videotaped participants in the ceremony.

¶16. (SBU) Chinh's eulogists included well-known lawyer and former statesman Tran Lam, who was one of the defense lawyers for high-profile dissidents Nguyen Van Dai and Le Thi Cong Nhan at their 2007 trial. Lam said that Chinh "abandoned communism with the heart of a patriotic intellectual." Chinh's oldest daughter noted that her father had been jailed by the French for five years and then later the "Communists" for 10 years. She played a message Chinh recorded before he died, in which he said with a weakened voice: "I wish you success in the struggle for freedom and independence and happiness for all Vietnamese people."

¶17. (SBU) Chinh's body laid in a closed coffin with a viewing window, for mourners to file past and pay respect, and he was later cremated, in a ceremony conducted by monks of the outlawed Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam (UBCV). Chinh had requested that a dissident colleague, UBCV leader Thich Quang Do conduct his funeral and cremate him in Buddhist tradition. Do, unable to attend due to house arrest restrictions in HCMC, sent one of his deputies to conduct the ceremony.

¶18. (SBU) At the ceremony, poloff noted the presence of a number of political activists, including Dr. Pham Hong Son (a dissident jailed for four years in 2002 for translating and disseminating a document on the State Department website, "What is Democracy?"); Nguyen Viet Trung, a HCMC-based youth leader and DPV associate, who is being forced into military conscription in the near future; Mrs. Tran Thi Le, the mother of jailed lawyer Le Thi Cong Nhan; and Mrs. Bui Kim Thanh, a land rights activist and current P1 visa applicant who was

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committed to a psychiatric hospital in late 2006, before being released under USG pressure in the summer of 2007. According to media reports, Thanh briefly scuffled with police while trying to unfurl a banner at the funeral; however, she was released after Chinh's family intervened. ConGen HCMC later spoke with Thanh and confirmed the incident. A number of activists conveyed thanks to poloff for the Embassy's representation and complained of ongoing police harassment and scrutiny.

AMBASSADOR MICHALAK ISSUES STATEMENT

¶19. (SBU) Ambassador Michalak, who had visited Chinh in the hospital in December, issued the following statement on February 15 that was widely covered in the international media:

"I was saddened to learn of the death of Hoang Minh Chinh and would like to express my deepest condolences to his family. Hoang Minh Chinh was a true patriot and proud Vietnamese. I had the honor of meeting him in December and was able to express my respect for his lifetime of effort on behalf of his beloved country and its people. Hoang Minh Chinh battled the cancer that eventually took his life with the same dignity and courage with which he fought for the rights of all Vietnamese. A key leader in Vietnam's struggle for independence, he continued that struggle throughout his life to have the voices of his fellow citizens heard. It is my profound hope that his legacy will live on and bear witness to Hoang Minh Chinh's undying love and commitment to the people of Vietnam."

¶10. (U) International wire services reported on Hoang Minh Chinh's death and funeral, most quoting from the Ambassador's statement. A number of western journalists have also reportedly requested an MFA response to the Ambassador's message. To date, no Vietnamese media outlets have covered either the death or funeral of Hoang Minh Chinh, nor has the MFA issued any kind of reaction to the Ambassador's statement.

COMMENT: PASSING OF A GENERATION

¶11. (SBU) Dr. Hoang Minh Chinh leaves a unique legacy as a hero of the independence movement who later became a senior member and

ideologue of the Communist Party, achieving the rank of Vice-Minister, before splitting with the Party in the 1960s over what he called the inevitable limitations and failings of communism.

His several terms in prison did not sway his views, and he became something of a father figure for political dissidents and the underground movement for multi-party democracy. It remains to be seen who from the next generation will take over the reins of the outlawed Democratic Party of Vietnam; what is clear is that the Ministry of Public Security will be watching very closely.

MICHALAK